R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 020 184 TE 000 505

THE MOSAIC OF ENGLISH, AN ESSAY REVIEW.

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PUB DATE NOV 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC NOT AVAILABLE FROM EDRS. 4P.

DESCRIPTORS- *CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED, *DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, *ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, *TEACHER ATTITUDES, *TEACHING METHODS, CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT, CLASSROOM TECHNIQUES, DISADVANTAGED ENVIRONMENT, DROPOUTS, ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED, EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED, PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY,

"ENGLISH AND THE DISADVANTAGED," EDITED BY EDWARD FAGAN (TE 000 504) IS THE PRODUCT OF A 1965 NDEA SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY IN ENGLISH FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH. THE BOOK REPRESENTS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF WHAT CAN HAPPEN WHEN TEACHERS ARE ALLOWED TO WORK WITH A VARIETY OF UNIVERSITY SPECIALISTS TO DEVELOP NEW ATTITUDES, PLANS, AND APPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING DISADVANTAGED YOUTH. THE CENTRAL PRINCIPLE OF THE INSTITUTE IS ALSO THAT OF THE BOOK--THAT ENGLISH IS A UNIFIED DISCIPLINE, A MOSAIC OF READING, WRITING, SPEAKING, AND LISTENING, AND MUST BE TAUGHT AS SUCH TO BE RELEVANT TO DISADVANTAGED PUPILS. DIRECTED TO TEACHERS AND PROFESSORS OF ENGLISH, EDUCATION, AND ENGLISH EDUCATION, THE BOOK DEMONSTRATES THAT BEFORE TEACHERS CAN TEACH THESE STUDENTS EFFECTIVELY, THEY MUST FIRST CHANGE THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THE DISADVANTAGED. IT MAY BE A MUCH NEEDED NEW DIRECTION IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH TO THE DISADVANTAGED. (THIS REVIEW APPEARED IN "THE RECORD" (COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY) VOL. 69 (NOVEMBER 1967), 185-188.) (DL)

ED020184

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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The Mosaic of English: An Essay Review

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English and the Disadvantaged.
Edward R. Fagan, Editor. Scranton, Pa.: International Textbook Company, 1967.

Here is a sign that we may someday have a "new English" in many schools which will provide an "up-staircase" for many educationally deprived and disadvantaged students who have known English as the cause of their heading down the "down-staircase" and out the school door permanently.

Some readers will see this as a dangerous book. It has striking implications for many school English programs and disturbing implications for many programs of teacher education. One might have hoped for a more balanced and detailed treatment of this little written about but essential subject, but few books of any sort have emerged from NDEA Institutes; and, of the many NDEA Institutes held since 1965, no more than a dozen have concerned themselves with the development of "a new English" for the educationally disadvantaged and deprived. Of the more than twenty national curriculum development projects in English done or being done with public and foundation support only three have devoted themselves specifically to English for the disadvantaged.

The 1965 "task force" report of the National Council of Teachers of English still stands as the only comprehensive national survey of the problem. Yet English is a required subject for all children, and such evidence as we have points to it as more of a cause for drop-outs (see the section "English Teaching and Drop-outs" by Robert J. Graham) than as a means for developing the communication abilities of young people. These problems are given comprehensive treatment by the nine contributors to this book, all of whom were participants or staff members in an NDEA Institute for Advanced Study in English for Disadvantaged Youth at the Pennsylvania State University during the summer of 1965.

Edward R. Fagan, the director of that Institute, has written an introduction, a focus for each section, and has co-authored or authored three of the chapters. The book represents an outstanding case study of the high quality of work which can emerge from an NDEA Institute when teachers are asked not only to learn new subject matter but also are given an opportunity to work with a variety of university specialists and develop new attitudes, plans, and applications.

It is unfortunate that much of the material in the last section, "Media and the Disadvantaged" (written by Edward R. Fagan and Helen M. Koch), could not have been placed in the Introduction or the first section, for it is here that one senses the vibrancy and relevance that insights drawn from the work of Edward Sapir, Marshall McLuhan, Ashley Montagu, John M. Culkin, Patrick Hazard, and others must have had for the teachers in this Institute.

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One confronts such notions as the following: "Students are as illiterate toward books as they are toward other media, yet other media can serve to bridge the literacy gap, and television is a major medium for accomplishing this–television requires involvement; it is sight plus sound, plus emotion. As a medium it is not just the pipeline through which reality is pumped, it actually shapes the reality we perceive." (p. 101). What emerges from Mrs. Koch's log of the activities developed with disadvantaged students in the year after the Institute took place are the concrete applications she was able to make in the study of film and television as media of communication in rural Pennsylvania *after* she had understood and accepted the reality and the significance of the above principle.

The concept of "English as a mosaic" was apparently central in the Institute as it is a central concept in the book. "English for those of us who identify it as our discipline–reading, writing, speaking and listening–has a unique identification heading; for example, it includes vocabulary, speed, and word density, which make it identifiable as a skill different from literature yet a part of literature. Such separate but combined aspects of English demand our understanding of bonding principles within the discipline so that we may teach English as a whole rather than as a series of discrete phenomena." (p.1). To anyone familiar with the recommendations of the Commission on English or the earlier Basic Issues Conference on the Teaching of English, such statements as the above must sound like heresy. One suspects that the authors mean to be heretical on this point. Their suggestion is clear that the earlier recommendations of these bodies regarding the structure of English as a discipline, e.g. that it consists only of language, literature, and composition in sequential doses, has made it too much a "series of discrete phenomena" and therefore "irrelevant" for many pupils, whether deprived, disadvantaged or not.

The matter of the "relevance" or rather the "irrelevance" of existing English programs for educationally deprived and disadvantaged young people is a major theme in this book. Sparked by a quotation from Richard Corbin's 1964 statement to the National Council of Teachers of English, which began the Task Force Survey, the plight of many disadvantaged young people can be pictured in some of the classes described: for example "a ninth grade class in the Adirondacks spending six weeks on a grammar unit based on diagramming sentences for homework assignments, putting the diagrammed sentences on the board without any teacher feedback as to whether the diagrams were right or wrong, turning in the homework papers which were dumped into the wastebasket while the students watched, and getting more sentences for diagramming for the next day's class." (pp. 2-3). In large part, most of the sections present compelling alternatives to the hopefully "atypical" horrible example described above, e.g. a section on "Linguistics and the Disadvantaged," by Clemens L. Hallman, "Reading and the Disadvantaged," by Anita E. Dunn, and "Composition and the Disadvantaged," by Theodora R. Graham. "Literature and the Disadvantaged," by Edward R. Fagan, tells of a new, exciting teaching technique experimentally developed by a young teacher in 1951 which became wholly contemporary in 1967 by suggesting how responsive chords can be found through probes of students' communication environment with the visual media of collage and film.

It is possible to read this book only as a collection of useful techniques for enhancing the learning of deprived and disadvantaged students in English classes, which indeed it is. But to miss the larger messages would be unfortunate, particularly after the tragic events in many American cities during the summer of 1967.

Professor Fagan addresses his book primarily to teachers of English and prospective teachers of English. Prospective teachers of English, however, are prepared by professors of English, professors of English Education, and professors of Education; and teachers of English are subject to the policies and administrative regulations of school boards, principals, and associate superintendents of curriculum. The more all-embracing messages here are, therefore, intended as well for Deans of Colleges of Education, Chairmen of English departments, and Presidents of teachers colleges. It may be of interest to many of them to note that this book comes from the combined efforts of teachers of English, professors of English Education, and educational researchers working together in the preparation and the carrying out of an NDEA Institute where theory, research, and practical classroom experience could be welded together in a total effort to change the teachers' perceptions of disadvantaged youth—the first step for any teacher in changing his behavior toward them.

From such a union came the section "Learning and the Classroom Climate" by John Withall (educational psychologist), drawing upon his own work as well as that of Brain, Polansky, Thelen, Jennings, Perkins, and Rogers. He applies a variety of insights to the behavior of an English teacher working with disadvantaged students through the use of a Social-Emotional Climate Index described in detail in an appendix. But there is a further analysis by Robert J. Graham (Professor of English Education) in "English and the Polylogue" of the meaning of Withall's proposals for day-to-day classroom learning and teaching. This is done by an English teacher in the language of the English teacher; and it could not have been done by one who had not had classroom teaching experience in English with disadvantaged students, no matter how well he knew the psychological principles involved. From his basic premise of the parallel of the "open class" to the "open society," Professor Graham moves to a description of the "informational, instrumental, and confrontational." Using these, he would "provide disorienting experience, undress stereotypes and reclothe individuals" in an English unit for sophomores in a "general" curriculum by using the poetry of e.e. cummings, Edwin Arlington Robinson, some short stories from John Updike and Salinger, as well as Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* and Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea.* With additional excursions into general semantics and mass media study, Graham describes an English classroom where so-called disadvantaged students "help plan class activities, regulate reading and writing assignments, participate in self-evaluation sessions, and prepare long range classroom schedules and discipline themselves to work with minimal supervision." Students work in teams, small groups, and independently as well as in a total class setting. Psychologist Whithall's model for "learning" in a "classroom climate" is described so that an English teacher, even an initially incredulous one, may know it in his own terms.

Too often, those in the policy-making roles in teacher education institutions

and research institutes have sought answers to the learning problems of educationally disadvantaged and deprived students by turning exclusively to the psychologist and the sociologist working in a university setting or in an institute for urban studies on a specific research problem. The generalizations derived from these projects only infrequently find their way to the classroom, unless teachers, supervisors, and university curriculum specialists, involved from the beginning, develop the project themselves and use the services of social scientists. Many of the answers lie in the empirical experiences of good teachers and not in the laboratory. A notable instance of the success of this principle is the Hunter College Gateway English program directed by Professor Marjorie Smiley, which has made the most comprehensive and relevant contribution to date in the creation of a new English program for disadvantaged junior high students.

This will be an unpopular book. It will not, for example, be popular with many in teacher education or the schools who have made up their minds that disadvantaged students "can't learn," or that the psychologist or the linguist working apart from the schools can formulate relevant answers to their burning problems. Nor will it be popular with those who would like to see all students presented with sequential increments of classical mythology in their early years so that they might better understand classical allusions in the literature they read in later life. Nor will traditional grammar or a pet linguistic theory be of any help. Yet this is precisely what English as a school subject is for many students, according to Charles Weingartner's insightful essay, "English for What" (reprinted from the *Teachers College Record* of December, 1965). Weingartner states the problem clearly: "What we have before us is the prospect of re-structuring English in a manner which permits the student—disadvantaged or otherwise—to enter with *his* emotional and intellectual experiences to participate in inquiries into how language works and what difference it makes, as well as into the literature of the world around him, and whether it is in print or some other medium, and in the process discover ways to assign viable meanings to the otherwise meaningless." Here is as clear a statement of direction as we are likely to need. Professor Fagan and his colleagues have made a beginning cut.

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